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(54) **KEEL BEAM OF AN AIRCRAFT**

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(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC B64C 3/185; B64C 1/26; B64C 1/065
See application file for complete search history.

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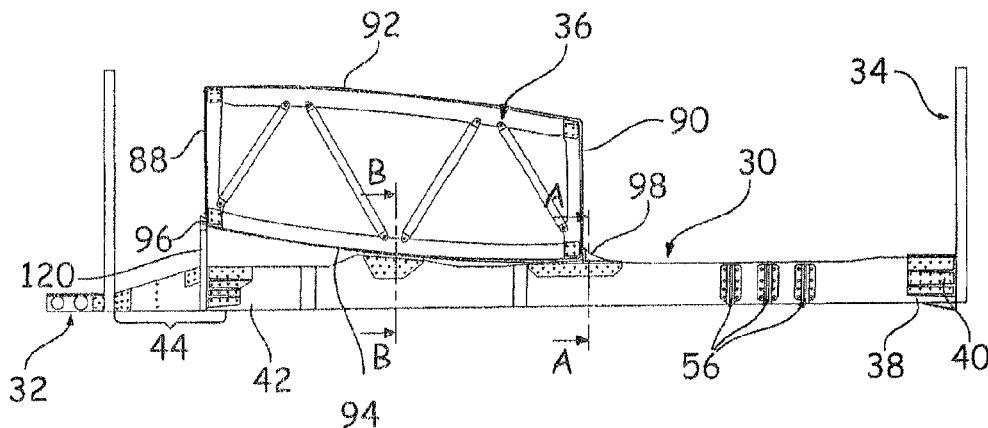
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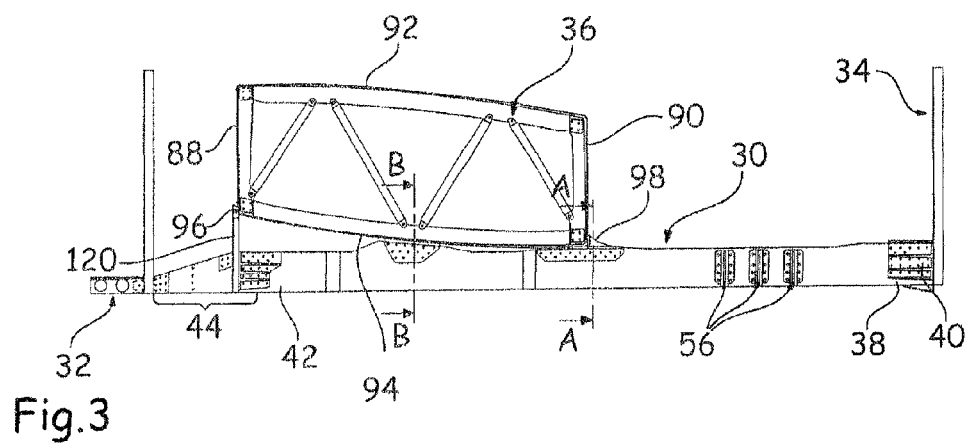
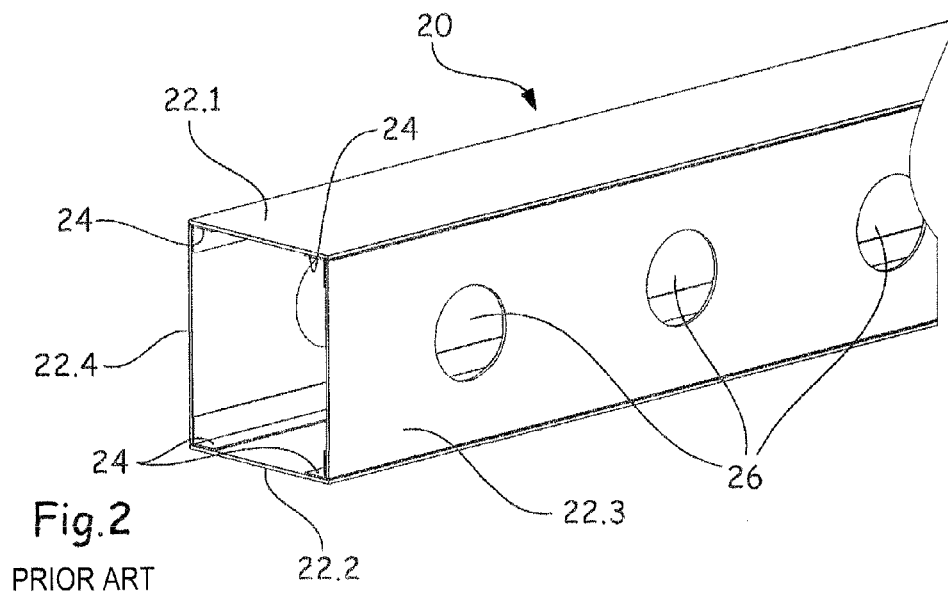
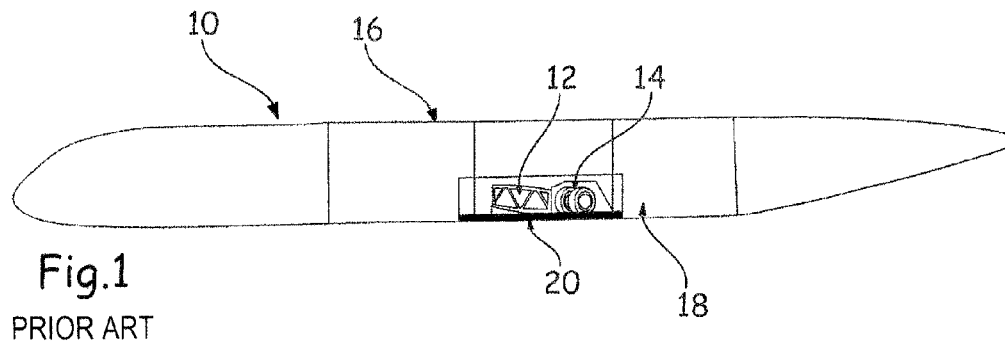
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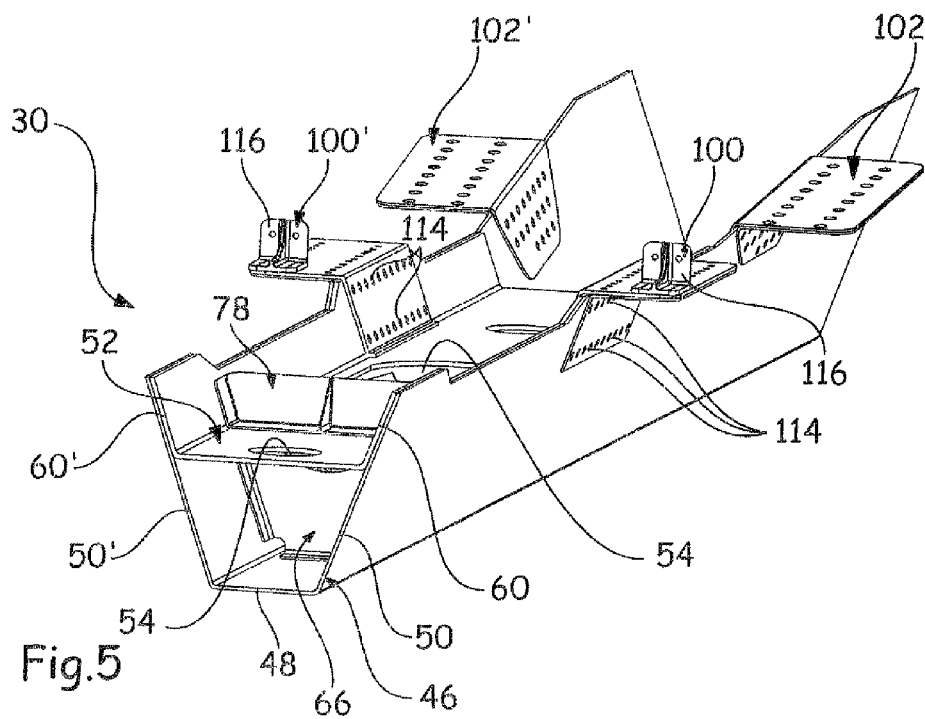
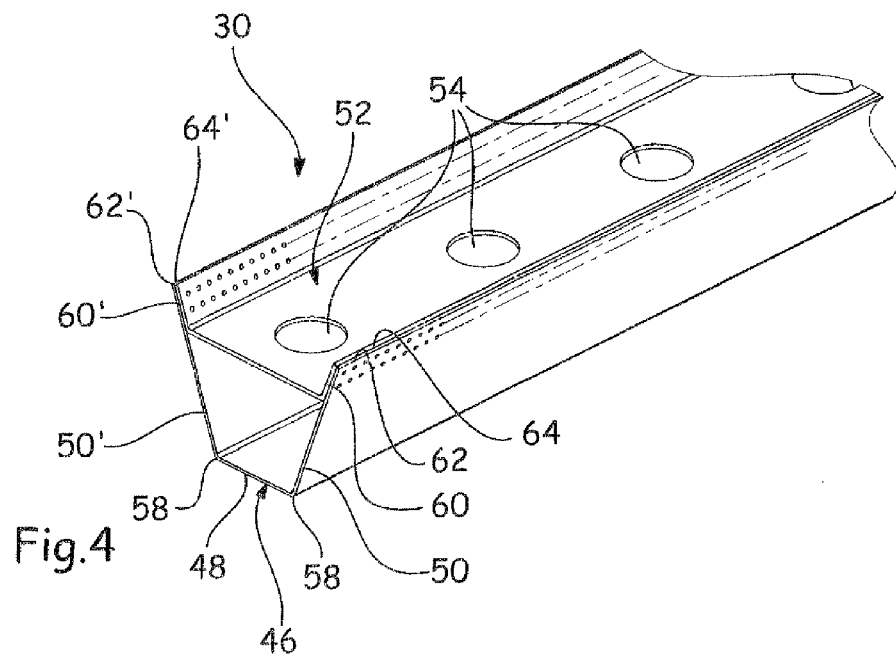
ABSTRACT

A keel beam connected to a central wing box of an aircraft and ensuring the connection between a front structure and a rear structure of an aircraft is characterized in that it includes, on the one hand, a U-shaped body with a horizontal base and two solid lateral walls, and on the other hand, a cover which has a U shape oriented in the same manner as the body, with a base in the lower portion and curved edges, the ends of which are oriented upward so that each curved edge includes an outer surface flattened against and fixed to the inner surface of the lateral walls in order to define, with the body, a closed section, the cover including openings for accessing the inside of the keel beam.

9 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets







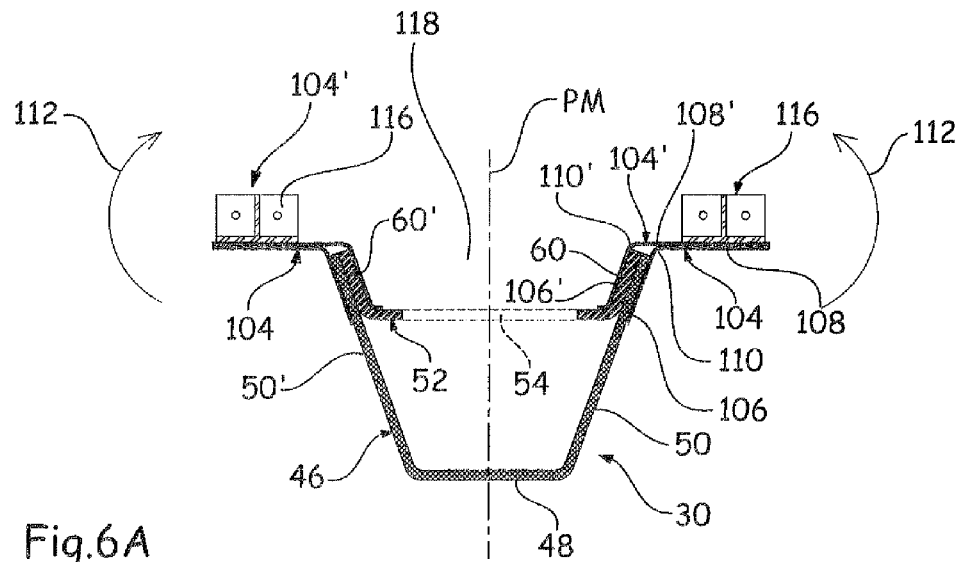


Fig.6A

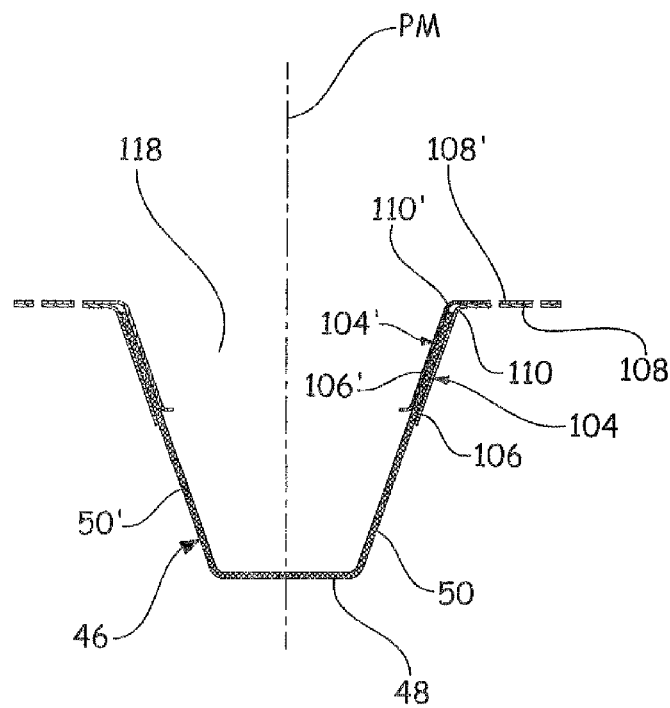


Fig.6B

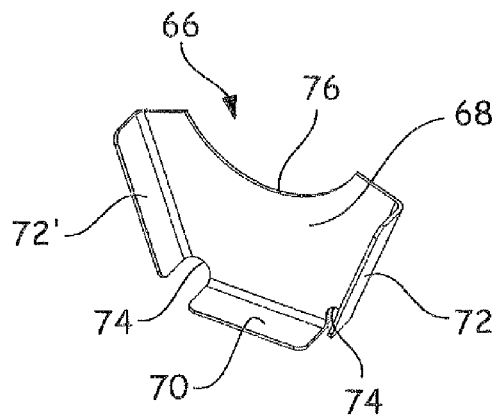


Fig.7

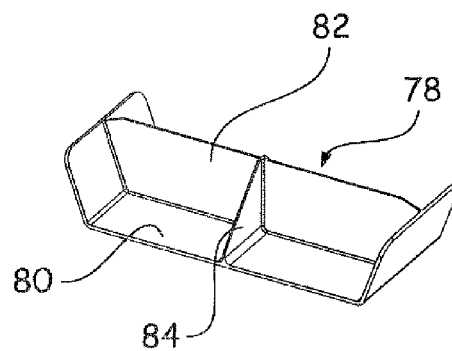


Fig.8

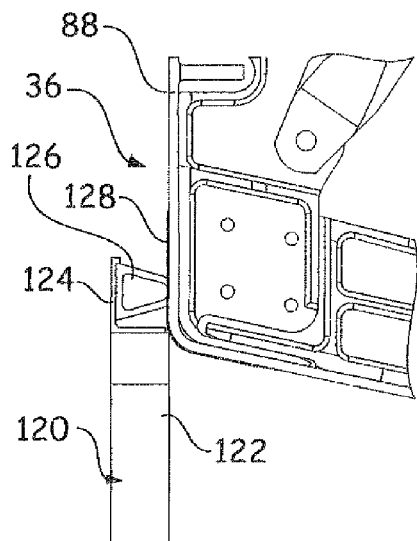


Fig.9

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KEEL BEAM OF AN AIRCRAFT**CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION**

This application is entitled to and claims the benefit of French Application No. FR 12 54203 filed May 9, 2012, the disclosure of which, including the specification, claims, drawings and abstract, is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

FIELD

The present invention relates to a keel beam of an aircraft.

BACKGROUND

FIG. 1 shows a schematic view of a fuselage **10** of an aircraft with a central wing box **12** providing the connection between the fuselage and the wings and a landing gear casing **14**. For the remainder of the description, longitudinal direction is to be understood as the direction corresponding to the greatest dimension of the fuselage. A transverse plane is a plane that is perpendicular to the longitudinal direction. The front of the aircraft corresponds to the nose of the fuselage and the rear corresponds to the tail unit.

On both sides of the central wing box **12** and/or of the landing gear casing **14**, the fuselage **10** comprises a first section **16** arranged at the front and a second section **18** arranged at the rear, the two sections **16** and **18** being connected by a keel beam **20** arranged under the central wing box **12**.

According to an embodiment shown in FIG. 2, a keel beam **20** is metallic and has a section substantially rectangular with an upper panel **22.1**, a lower panel **22.2**, two lateral panels **22.3** and **22.4** connected by angle plates **24** at each angle.

To enable this assembly, the lateral panels **22.3** and **22.4** have openings **26** to enable access to the fastenings located inside the beam.

The fact that the lateral panels have openings necessarily impacts the strength of the beam, which makes it necessary to increase the size of its section for taking up forces.

Alternatively, the elements of the beam are made of composite material. Even if this solution makes it possible to reduce the onboard mass, it does not optimize it considering the geometry of the elements constituting the beam.

According to another drawback, the free edges of the panels forming the beam, particularly those provided in the area of the lower angles, are exposed to the path of tire or rim debris when the landing gear is out. In the case of the panels from composite material, an impact in the area of the side of the panel can have substantial consequences on the mechanical characteristics of the panel.

According to another drawback, the keel beam and the central wing box are connected by means of splice plates which do not allow any slight deformation around an axis, parallel to the longitudinal direction. The rigidity of the connection between the central wing box and the keel beam causes the stresses in the area of the keel beam caused by the flexion forces of the wings to be increased.

SUMMARY

The present invention aims at overcoming the drawbacks of the prior art.

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According to a first object, the invention proposes a particular design of the keel beam allowing the onboard mass to be optimized and the risks of damage to be reduced.

To this end, the object of the invention is a keel beam which is characterized in that it comprises, on the one hand, a U-shaped body with a horizontal base and two solid lateral walls (without openings), and on the other hand, a U-shaped cover oriented in the same manner as the body, with a base in the lower part and curved edges whose ends are oriented upward so that each curved edge comprises an outer surface flattened against and fixed to the inner surface of the ends of the lateral walls of the U-shaped body in order to define, with the body, a closed section, said cover comprising openings for accessing the inside of the keel beam.

Therefore, according to the invention, there is no free edge in the area of the lower angles of the keel beam, which tends to improve the strength of the beam vis-a-vis possible tire or rim debris. In addition, it is possible to optimize the sizing of the beam by eliminating the openings in the area of the lateral walls and by creating openings in the area of the cover.

Preferably, the lateral walls are flared.

According to another object, the invention aims at improving the connection between the keel beam and the central wing box in order to allow slight deformations around axes, parallel to the longitudinal direction.

To this end, the keel beam comprises two anchoring points arranged on both sides of said beam to connect the keel beam to the central wing box, each anchoring point comprising at least one metallic splice plate with a first portion comprising means of connection with the lateral wall of the body of the keel beam and a second portion outward of the beam providing a support surface for the lower panel of the central wing box and which is connected to the lower panel of the central wing box by connection means, the two portions being connected by an area of curvature adapted to be deformed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

Other characteristics and advantages will become apparent from the description that follows, the description being given only by way of example, with reference to the annexed drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is a schematic view of a fuselage according to the prior art;

FIG. 2 is a schematic view showing, in perspective, a keel beam according to the prior art;

FIG. 3 is a lateral view of a keel beam according to the invention;

FIG. 4 is a schematic view of a keel beam according to the invention without reinforcement and without splice plate;

FIG. 5 is a perspective view of a keel beam according to the invention with reinforcements and splice plates;

FIG. 6A is a cross-sectional view along the transverse plane AA of FIG. 3;

FIG. 6B is a cross-sectional view along the transverse plane BB of FIG. 3;

FIG. 7 is a perspective view of a first reinforcement according to the invention;

FIG. 8 is a perspective view of a second reinforcement according to the invention; and

FIG. 9 is a detailed view of a contact zone between a central wing box and a frame affixed to the keel beam.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 3 shows a keel beam **30** of an aircraft for connecting a front structure **32** and a rear structure **34** of an aircraft. The

keel beam **30** is also connected to a central wing box **36**. The keel beam **30** comprises a rear end **38** connected by means of splice plates **40** to the rear structure **34** and a front end **42** connected by means of an assembly of reinforcements and splice plates **44** to the front stricture **32**.

The keel beam **30** is made of composite material to reduce the onboard mass. Alternatively, it may be metallic and obtained by bending, extrusion, pressure forming, explosion forming.

According to the invention, the keel beam **30** comprises, on the one hand, a first U-shaped portion **46**, later referred to as a body, with a horizontal base **48** and two lateral solid walls **50**, **50'**, and on the other hand, a second portion **52** referred to as a cover which defines, with the body **46**, a closed section and which comprises openings **54** for accessing the inside of the keel beam **30**. Different elements such as anchoring points, brackets for bearings of door of landing gear casing **56**, splice plates, are affixed to the keel beam by fasteners.

By "solid" it is to be understood that the lateral walls have no cutout in the same manner as the cover for allowing access to the inside of the beam.

Contrary to the prior art, the access to the inside of the beam, particularly to make the fasteners accessible, is not created by openings housed in the area of the lateral walls. Therefore, it is possible to optimize the sizing of the beam by eliminating the openings in the area of the lateral walls and by creating openings in the area of the cover **52**. Hence, the lateral walls **50**, **50'** of the body **46** do the work.

Advantageously, the lateral walls **50**, **50'** are flared, the dimension between the lateral walls increasing in a direction away from the base **48**. Therefore, the body presents a trough-shaped transverse section. By "trough", it is to be understood that the body has a transverse cross-section in the shape of an isosceles trapezoid, the shorter base being arranged in the lower portion, the upper base being open.

This configuration allows the forces to be better taken up by the keel beam.

"According to another advantage of the invention, the base **48** and the lateral walls **50**, **50'** are made in one piece which comprises, in the area of the junction zones, rounded shapes **58**. Therefore, contrary to the prior art, there is no free edge in the area of the lower angles of the keel beam, which tends to improve the strength of the beam vis-a-vis possible tire or rim debris."

According to another characteristic of the invention, the U-shaped cover **52** is oriented in the same manner as the body **46**, namely, a base in the lower portion and curved edges **60**, **60'** whose ends are oriented upward so that each curved edge comprises an outer surface flattened against and fixed to the lower surface of the ends of the lateral walls **50**, **50'**. According to this configuration, the two ends of the fasteners used to affix the body and the cover are accessible from the outside of the keel beam **30**. Advantageously, the sides **62**, **62'** of the lateral walls are arranged along the extension, respectively, of the sides **64**, **64'** of the curved edges **60**, **60'**.

Different embodiments can be envisioned to make the body **46** and the cover **52** from composite material.

The shapes of the cover and body allow, for each, a very simple embodiment by molding on a male mold.

Therefore, according to an embodiment, first, fiber layers are arranged on a male mold. After all the layers have been set in place, a flexible mold, referred to as a "caul-plate", is attached.

According to this method, the two surfaces of the body are smooth, the first being in contact with the male mold, the other with the flexible mold.

According to a first alternative, dry fiber layers can be used to obtain a dry preform which is thus resin-impregnated, then polymerized.

According to another alternative, fiber layers pre-impregnated with a thermosetting resin can be used, the preform being subsequently polymerized.

According to another alternative, fiber layers pre-impregnated with thermoplastic resin can be used, the preform being subsequently consolidated.

Preferably, the beam comprises inner reinforcements **66** arranged between the body **46** and the cover **52**. Each inner reinforcement **66** comprises a plate **68** arranged along a transverse plane, with two edges connected to the lateral walls **50**, **50'** of the body **46**. This solution makes it possible to guarantee the spacing of the lateral walls from the keel beam and improve the stability of the latter.

According to an embodiment shown in FIG. 7, the plate **68** comprises, in the area of three sides, edges curved at 90° with respect to the plate **68**, a first curved edge **70**, one of the surfaces of which is flattened against and fixed to the base **48** of the body **46**, a second curved edge **72**, one of the surfaces of which is flattened against and fixed to one of the lateral walls **50** of the body and a third curved edge **72'**, one of the surfaces of which is flattened against and fixed to the other lateral wall **50'**.

The curved edges **70**, **72**, **72'** are fixed to the body **46** by any appropriate means.

Preferably, the plate **68** comprises, in the area of its lower angles, cutouts **74** to make it possible to bend the curved edges **70**, **72**, **72'**.

Advantageously, the plate **68** comprises, in the area of its upper edge, a cutout **76** with a large radius of curvature. This configuration makes it possible to increase the possibility of flexion deformation along the longitudinal axis of the beam.

According to an embodiment, the keel beam **30** comprises at least one outer reinforcement **78** arranged outside the closed section of the beam and connecting the lateral walls **50** and **50'** of the body.

As shown in FIG. 8, the outer reinforcement **78** comprises a U-shaped strip **80** which is flattened against and fixed to the upper surface of the cover **52**, a first rib **82** arranged along a transverse plane connected to the base and to the branches of the U, as well as a second rib **84** perpendicular to the base of the U and to the first rib **82**, equidistant from the branches of the U.

According to another characteristic, the keel beam **30** comprises a connection with the central wing box **36** which allows slight deformations around axes parallel to the longitudinal direction.

According to an embodiment shown in FIG. 3, a central wing box **36** comprises a front panel **88** perpendicular to the longitudinal direction, a rear panel **90**, perpendicular to the longitudinal direction, an upper panel **92** and a lower panel **94** oriented toward the keel beam. In a longitudinal and vertical plane, the lower edge **94** is curved and its front edge **96** is higher than its rear edge **98**.

The connection between the keel beam and the central wing box comprises two first anchoring points **100**, **100'** on both sides of said keel beam in the area of the rear edge **98** and two second anchoring points **102**, **102'** on both sides of said keel beam in the area of a median zone of the lower panel **94** (the median zone being approximately equidistant from the front edge **96** and rear edge **98**).

The anchoring points **100**, **100'** are symmetrical with respect to a longitudinal median plane PM of the keel beam. Insofar as they are symmetrical, only the anchoring point **100** is described.

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As shown in FIG. 6A, the anchoring point **100** comprises at least one metal splice plate **104** with a first portion **106** which comprises means of connection with the upper portion of the lateral wall **50** of the body **46** of the keel beam and a second portion **108** oriented outward of the beam which offers a support surface for the lower panel **94** of the central wing box and which is connected to the lower panel **94** by connection means. The two portions **106** and **108** are connected by a zone of curvature **110** which is adapted to deform around an axis, parallel to the longitudinal direction, as indicated schematically with the arrows **112** in order to facilitate the flexion of the wings. The splice plates are made of metal to obtain an elastic limit that is higher than a composite material.

Preferably, the anchoring point **100** comprises two splice plates **104**, **104'** flattened against one another in the area of the second portions **108**, **108'** and whose first portions **106**, **106'** are arranged on both sides of the upper portion of the lateral wall **50** of the body or of the upper portion of the lateral wall **50** of the body and of the curved edge **60** of the cover. Thus, in the area of the first portions **106** and **106'**, the splice plates **104**, **104'** encircle the upper portion of the lateral wall **50** of the body or the upper portion of the lateral portion **50** of the body and the curved edge **60** of the cover. Fasteners **114** are provided to ensure the connection between the keel beam **30** and the splice plates **104**, **104'**. These fasteners **114** run through the splice plates **104**, **104'**, the lateral wall **50** and the curved edge **60** of the cover.

As shown in FIG. 6B, the anchoring points **102** and **102'** are symmetrical with respect to the longitudinal median plane PM of the keel beam and are designed in the same manner as the anchoring points **100** and **100'**.

In the absence of the cover in their area, the splice plates **104** and **104'** of the anchoring points **102** and **102'** encircle only the lateral wall **50** or **50'** of the body.

As shown in FIG. 6A, the anchoring points **100** and **100'** each comprise a corner bracket **116** against which the rear panel **90** of the central wing box can take support.

According to another advantage of the invention, the keel beam **30** comprises a recess **118** between the anchoring points **100** and **100'** or **102** and **102'** which facilitates the flexion of the wings.

According to another aspect of the invention, the front end **42** of the keel beam **30** is connected by means of splice plates **44** to a frame **120** referred to as a front half-moon frame. According to an embodiment shown in FIG. 9, the front half-moon frame **120** comprises a wall **122** arranged along a transverse plane, at the front of the front panel **88** of the central wing box. The upper edge **124** of the wall **122** comprises, in the area of the surface oriented toward the central wing box, a sealing joint **126** in contact with the front panel **88** of the central wing box. During the flexion of the wings, the sealing joint **126** rubs against a foil **128** glued against the outer surface of the front panel **88**.

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The invention claimed is:

1. A keel beam for being connected to a central wing box of an aircraft and ensuring the connection between a front structure and a rear structure of the aircraft, said keel beam comprising:

a U-shaped body having a horizontal base and two solid lateral walls, and

a cover in a shape of a U oriented in a same manner as the body, said cover comprising a base in a lower portion and curved edges whose ends are oriented upward so that each curved edge comprises an outer surface flattened against or fixed to an inner surface of the lateral walls in order to define, with the body, a closed section, said cover comprising openings for accessing an inside of the keel beam.

2. The keel beam according to claim 1, wherein the lateral walls are flared, and a dimension between the lateral walls increases in a direction away from the horizontal base.

3. The keel beam according to claim 1, further comprising two anchoring points arranged on both sides of said beam to connect said beam to the central wing box.

4. The keel beam according to claim 3, wherein each said anchoring point comprises at least one metal splice plate with a first portion which comprises means of connection with a lateral wall of the body of the keel beam and a second portion oriented outward of the beam which offer a support surface for a lower panel of the central wing box and which is connected to the lower panel by connection means, the first and second portions being connected by a zone of curvature adapted to be deformed.

5. The keel beam according to claim 4, wherein each said anchoring point comprises two splice plates flattened against one another in the area of the second portions and whose first portions are arranged on both sides of the upper portion of the lateral portion of the body or of the upper portion of the lateral wall of the body and of the cover.

6. The keel beam according to claim 3, wherein the anchoring points are symmetrical with respect to a longitudinal median plane of the keel beam.

7. The keel beam according to claim 1, wherein the beam comprises inner reinforcements arranged between the body and the cover, each of them comprising a plate arranged along a transverse plane with two edges connected to the lateral walls of the body.

8. The keel beam according to claim 7, wherein the plate comprises in the area of an upper edge thereof, a cutout with a large radius of curvature.

9. The keel beam according to claim 1, further comprising at least one outer reinforcement arranged outside the closed section of the beam and connecting the lateral walls of the body.

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